

**"Fortissimi sunt BELGAE"**

JULIUS CAESAR

*Julius Caesar:*  
*De Bello Gallico*

"GALLIA EST OMNIS DIVISA IN PARTES TRES, QUARUM UNAM INCOLUNT BELGAE, aliam Aquitani, tertiam qui ipsorum lingua Celtae, nostra Galli appellantur. Hi omnes lingua, institutis, legibus inter se differunt. Gallos ab Aquitanis Garumna flumen, a Belgis Matrona et Sequana dividit. Horum omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae, propterea quod a cultu atque humanitate provinciae longissime absunt, minimeque ad eos mercatores saepe conveniunt atque ea quae ad effeminandos animos pertinent important, proximique sunt Germanis, qui trans Rhenum incolunt quibuscum continenter bellum gerunt."

*Julius Caesar:*  
*The Gallic War*

"GAUL IS A WHOLE DIVIDED INTO THREE PARTS, ONE OF WHICH IS INHABITED BY THE BELGAE, another by the Aquitani, and a third by a people called in their own tongue Celtae, in the latin Galli. All these are different from one another in language, institutions, and laws. The Galli are separated from the Aquitani by the river Garonne, from the Belgae by the Marne and the Seine. Of all these peoples the Belgae are the most courageous, because they are farthest removed from the culture and the civilization of the Province, (\*) and least often visited by merchants introducing the commodities that make for effeminacy and also because they are nearest to the Germans dwelling beyond the Rhine, with whom they are continually at war."

(\*) Roman Province Gallia Narbonensis

# *“Fortissimi Sunt Belgae”*

## The Heroism of the Belgian Army of 1940

by Lieutenant-Colonel  
MARCEL A. RONGÉ

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8 Aug 1949 M B

IN MEMORY OF MY  
COMRADES WHO FELL  
ON THE FIELD OF  
HONOR DURING THE  
BATTLE OF BELGIUM

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### ***The Author***

*The author of this study, Lieutenant-Colonel of Artillery Marcel A. Rongé, a staff officer of the Reserve and veteran of the great War, served as Chief of the Belgian Military Mission attached to the First French Army during the Battle of Belgium. The First Army under the command of General Blanchard became the right wing of the Northern Group of Allied Armies after the breach of the Allied front between Namur and Sedan. The author followed closely all the operations of the first French Army between May 10th and 28th. Due to his continuous contact with the British and Belgian GHQ, he was particularly well placed to gather information on the ensemble of the Belgian campaign. He also witnessed events which immediately preceded and followed the surrender of the Belgian Army.*





A gun muzzle juts from a subterranean casement of Belgium's fortifications

**B**ELGIUM IS A SMALL NATION OF GREAT TOILERS. ITS FOREIGN POLICY has never known any other objective than peace. But a peace with independence and honor.

Belgians are not the only people to whom Belgium's territorial security and integrity is of interest. Because of its geographic position, our country constitutes a natural corridor of invasion between Germany and Gaul and vice-versa, and it is a protecting security zone for England. None of Belgium's powerful neighbors has ever wanted to leave the marked strategic advantage the possession of that country would grant, in the hands of a third power.

It is therefore not to be wondered at that for centuries great nations have fought each other for the possession of our hapless provinces. Continuously ravaged by war, the latter passed from hand to hand, and if they were always rebuilt, it was only thanks to the unswerving energy of their inhabitants. "Belgium is the battlefield of Europe."

As these foreign designs on Belgium's territory were an ever-recurring source of terrible conflicts, the great powers of Europe wished to put an end to such an unstable state of affairs by an international agreement which imposed on Belgium — whose independence had been recognized after the Revolution of 1830 — the status of a perpetually neutral state whose inviolability and security were solemnly guaranteed by the contracting powers in the International Treaty of April 18, 1839.



One of the huge "280" guns on rails

A country must have an army reflecting its foreign policy. Therefore, in August 1914, Belgium—confident in the pledged word of its guarantors—had but a small army to defend her independence and to give the loyal powers, who had sworn to do so, the time to come to her help, if ever a treacherous nation betrayed its sacred obligations toward her.

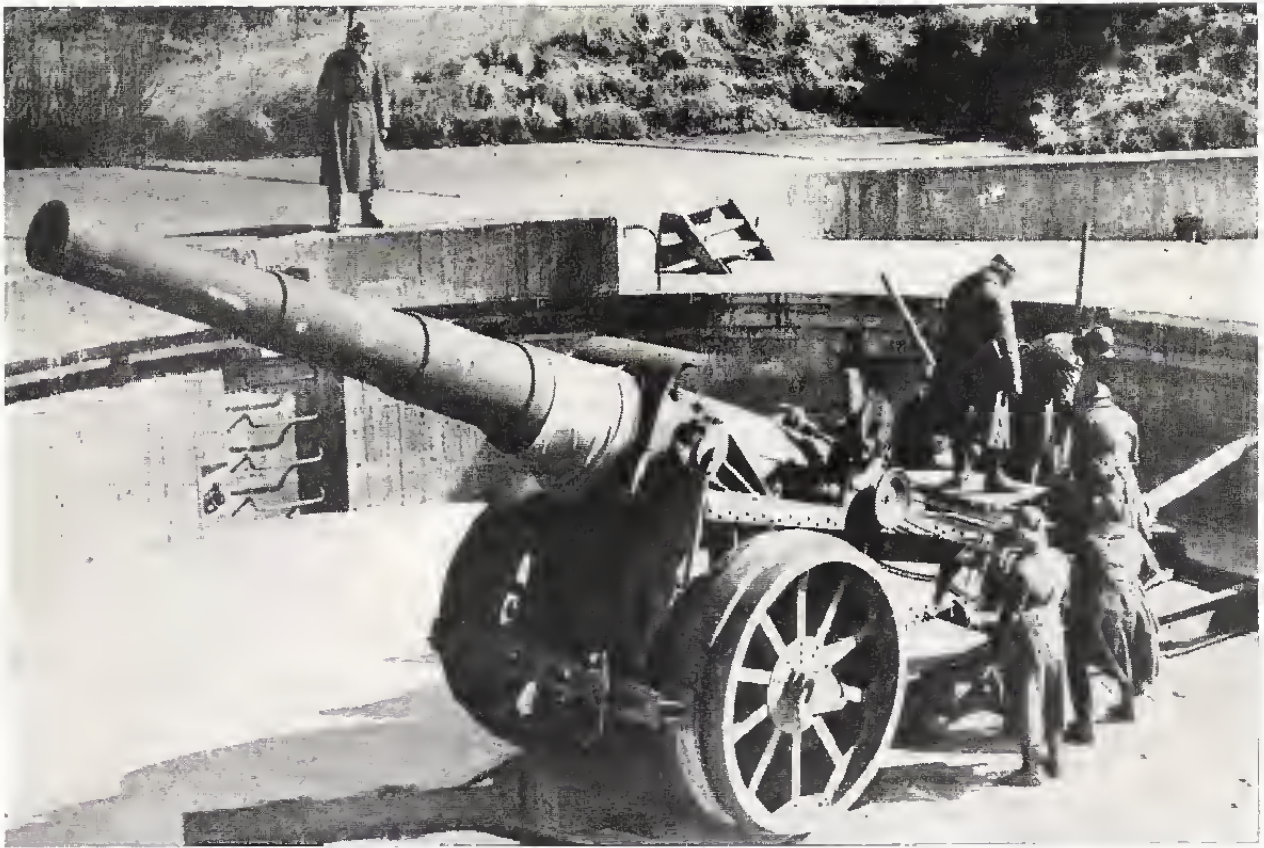
Significantly, in 1914, seventy-five years after its adherence to the above-mentioned agreement, Imperial Germany disowned her word and sent her gigantic armies of invasion storming across the border. The Treaty of 1839 was termed—in the very words of the German chancellor—"nothing but a scrap of paper."

The Belgian Army of 1914 amounted to hardly 150,000 men. Its fortress troops did not number over 80,000 men.

Insufficiently equipped and trained, supported by antiquated or inadequate fortifications, the Belgian Army of 1914, moved by an ardent patriotism and reconciled to every sacrifice, imprinted in letters of blood the Book of History with the sublime pages of its heroism. On three occasions—at Liège, Namur and on the banks of the Yser—it saved the allied armies from destruction; its gallant behavior galvanized the world.

Later, in 1918, after years of vigilant and tough guard at the northern wing of the allied front, strengthened, well equipped and trained, the Belgian Army participating in the General Offensive, in a particularly difficult region, amazed the Allied High Com-





One of the big coast guns in a concrete emplacement

mand by its lightning successes and, to quote a great French general, "by its offensive fervor, its firmness, its training and its maneuvring capability, the Belgian Army has proven itself the equal of the best French crack divisions."

Belgium played an essential part—military, political and moral—in the war of 1914-1918 and in its victorious outcome.

### **Belgium spared no effort in preparing against a new aggression**

**T**HE Treaty of Versailles made Belgium an integrally independent nation and master of her destiny; she entered the League of Nations, whose associate members lodged their hopes in the construction of a long era of peace and security by substituting right for might.

Some time later, profoundly aware of its international obligations and desirous of collaborating with all its strength in the consolidation of peace, Belgium signed the Treaty of Locarno, a fair mutual guarantee and assistance pact, aiming at ensuring all nations of Western Europe, Germany included, a peace based on the system of collective security.

Once again, Germany in defiance of its obligations destroyed the peace structure so laboriously set up. The military occupation of the Rhineland in 1936 and the absence of any reaction from the great powers radically jeopardized Belgium's security and exposed it to a mortal danger.





In a coastal battery

In order not to be involved in conflicts in which she had no part or interest and in order to safeguard, as well as possible, the integrity of her territory, Belgium had no other choice but to follow one policy: to be released by France and England of her obligations under the Treaty of Locarno and to strengthen her military power to the maximum of its ability.

This attitude was accepted by the French and English governments. Spontaneously, they offered to extend us their help, if we appealed for it, in case of aggression. Germany also took the solemn obligation to respect the inviolability of our territory.

Henceforth, Belgium's policy was one of independence, but vigilant and realistic.

Belgium's military effort was considerable. In spite of her economic and financial difficulties, she devoted to it all her resources.

When war broke out in Europe, on September 1, 1939 the Belgians were able to put into the field an army of 600,000 men. This force was composed of seven army corps (twenty infantry divisions), one cavalry corps comprising two mechanized divisions, important Army and Fortress troops, and numerous battalions of frontier guards.

This military force was well armed, equipped and trained. Both active and reserve elements were perfectly instructed in the art of modern warfare. Abundantly provided with automatic weapons, artillery of every calibre, among which our excellent 47 m/m anti-tank guns, and modern equipment, our army had accumulated large reserves of munitions, equipment and food, and had prepared down to the last detail the industrial mobilization of the nation.

The defense system of the country was designed to take advantage of the terrain and all natural obstacles. Some obstacles such as the Albert Canal—had even been artificially constructed. Every technique of the art of fortification had been exploited to establish these powerful depth-defense zones.

This defensive organization had, however, two weak points.

First, our front facing the most likely aggressor stretched from Maeseyck to Arlon, a distance of nearly 120 miles, or more than two thirds the length of the Franco-German frontier. Thus it was impossible for our army to defend the entire Belgian frontier.

Second, our deficiency in planes and armored units loomed as the second flaw in our defense set-up. In all, we had 300 planes, too few of which were recent models, and two light mechanized divisions, completely devoid of medium and heavy tanks.

It is virtually impossible for a small country to maintain an efficient aircraft or

automobile industry, especially when both are called upon to turn out highly specialized war products. It must acquire this kind of material from its larger neighbors, provided that these powers are willing to acquiesce in its demands and that their capacity for production be in a position to meet their smaller neighbor's needs.

It is futile to dwell upon the difficulties encountered by our army, during recent years, in its efforts to procure modern planes and armored cars; it need only be recalled that the large neighboring armies themselves either lacked such equipment or were feverishly piling it up for their own purposes.

Nevertheless, it was reasonable and logical to count on the assistance promised us by the great powers in case of aggression. We expected, and rightly so, that these allied armies would hold part of our front. We also hoped to see our aerial and armored units strongly reinforced by those of our eventual allies. On this last point our expectations were far from being met.

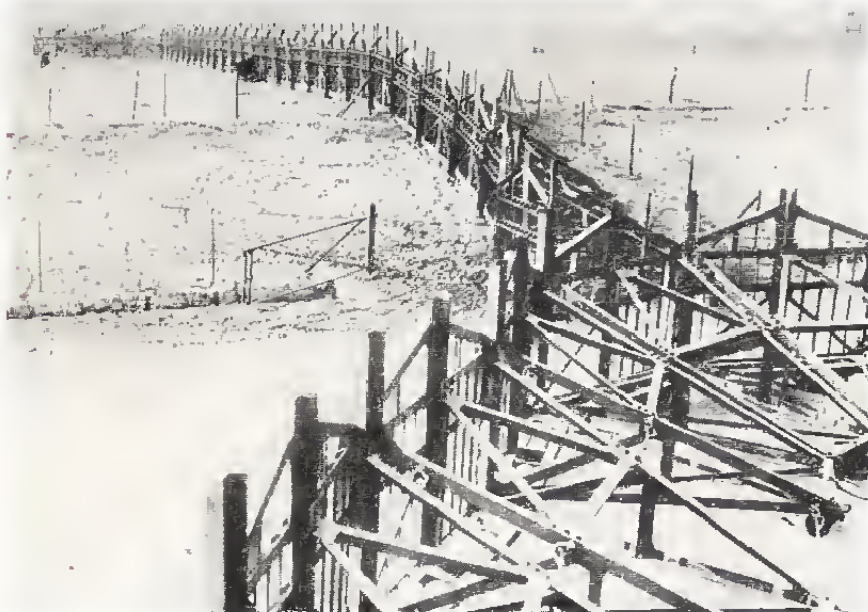
On the very first day of hostilities in September, 1939, the Belgian Government proclaimed our neutrality in the conflict; the Belgian Army mobilized the larger part of its effectives.

For eight months our country was spared the horrors of war. During this time, it toiled without respite to complete the training and equipment of the army and to consolidate its defense.

It can be estimated that, when the German army of invasion came storming against us, our military strength was approximately ten times greater than that which we were able to muster against the aggressor in 1914. This result was worthy of the patriotism,



Troops in a trench



Anti-Tank barrier across a road





Floods offering an efficient obstacle against tanks and infantry

ual sympathies were too spirited to be concealed, we were wise enough to understand that it was not for us to irritate Germany by attitudes or acts which might provoke her to unleash an all-out "blitz" against us.

But we were also realistic enough to strengthen continuously our defenses in the direction where the greater menace seemed to loom, while at the same time we guarded ourselves from all sides. The massing of 80 German divisions, twelve of which were "Panzerdivisionen", along our frontier and that of Holland was not likely to inspire us with confidence.

In the Northeast and East, our first line defense positions were established on the Albert Canal, in the fortified areas of Liège and of the zone south of the Meuse, and at the fortress of Namur, forming an arc of 150 miles.

A second fortified position—known as the KW line—ran from the fortified zone of Antwerp to the south through Louvain and Wavre, up to Namur. This front, about 75 miles long, was intended to serve as the main line of resistance.

determination and foresight of the nation.

The Belgian Government desiring not to furnish any bases or pretext for aggression, no matter whence its origin, took all measures necessary for the loyal and strict observance of our neutrality.

We did not follow a policy of appeasement: we were too small a nation and had nothing to offer toward that end. We were correct neutrals, and even if our individ-

An anti-aircraft gun in position and manned



Other defensive lines facing southward, intermediary lines and even coastal defenses completed our defense structure so as to meet other eventualities.

Our strategic position was extremely delicate: in case of aggression from the East and Northeast, our army would be called upon to act—as in 1914—as the vanguard of the eventual Allied forces and fight a delaying action, in order to allow them enough time to swing into their battle positions.

### **The attack of May 10th. The Belgian Army covers the lining-up of the Allied Armies. The French front pierced between Namur and Sedan**

**F**OR eight months our troops vigilantly mounted guard on all our defense fronts, calmly awaiting the enemy. Their morale was splendid and their combative spirit increased in assurance with each passing day.

On May 10, 1940, Germany once more ignominiously broke her pledge. Before dawn, without any preliminary warning, our army was violently attacked by gigantic German forces. The interior of the country and its lines of communications were subjected to a brutal aerial bombardment. Our tiny air force was quickly rendered powerless. Concentrated infantry fire, a systematic pounding by automatic weapons and artillery of all calibres, massive tank attacks, aerial bombardments and machine-gunning from Stuka dive bombers, parachute attacks—such was the inferno unleashed on our front. Even the most hardened veterans of the last war could not recall such a homicidal hellfire. Our young troops, determined to stand their ground, stiffened their resistance and held out.

A portable army radio. The motorcycle side car contains the portable receiver-transmitter. Current is furnished by the motor-operated dynamo.

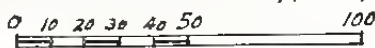


At some points, however, the intensity of fire and the surprise occasioned by new fighting methods compelled them to give way. The deadly fire and even traitorous assassinations annihilated the officers and detachments entrusted with certain destructive duties. As a result, three bridges on the Albert Canal were not blown up.

Two of these bridges, nevertheless, were destroyed the day after, one thanks to the heroism of



SCALE OF MILES (Approx.)

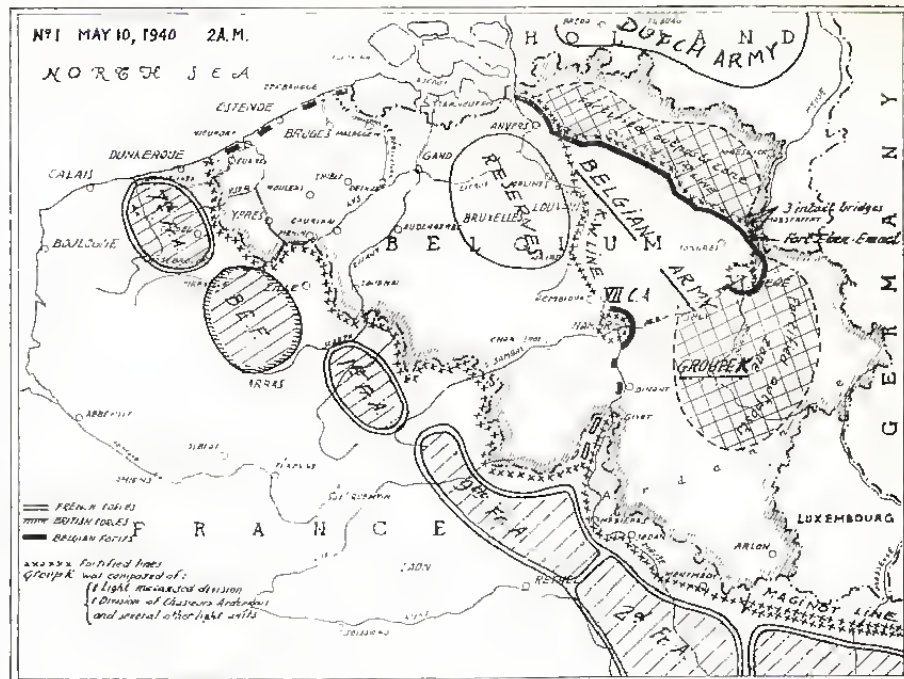


MAP NO. 1.

This map shows the position held by the French, British and Belgian armies just prior to the German attack.

The KW line—Antwerp—Namur—being the line of resistance along which the allies decided to deploy their troops in the event of a German aggression on Belgium, the Belgian Army holds an advanced guard position on the Albert Canal, at Liège and Namur. This position is in turn protected by fortified outposts held by important Belgian forces in front of the Albert Canal as well as to the East and South of the Mense.

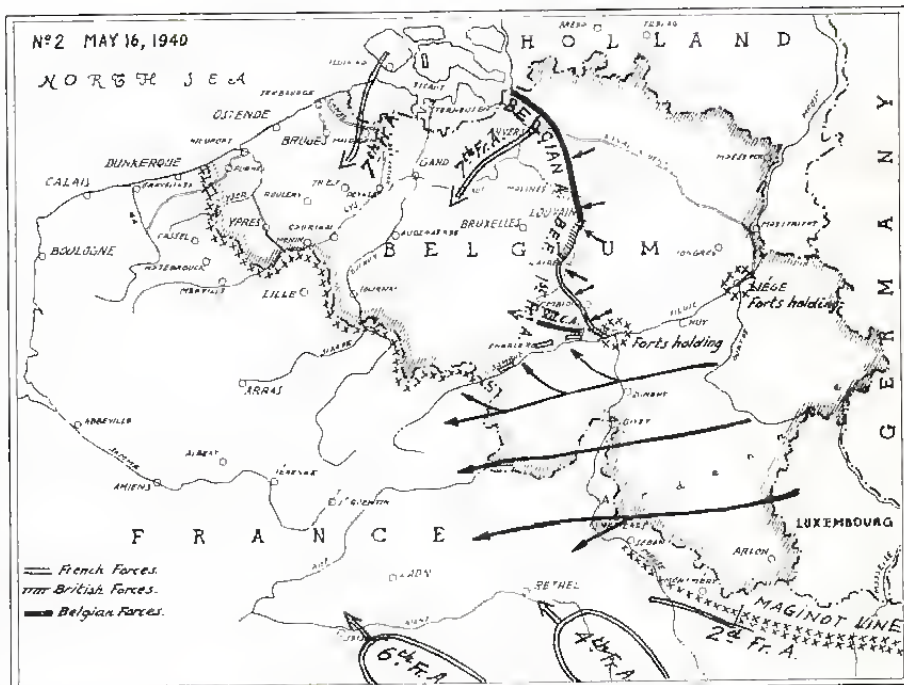
This combined layout enabled the Belgian Army to stave off the invading armies for several days and thus give the allied forces time to establish themselves along the main line of defense in order to bear the brunt of the enemy shock.



MAP NO. 2.

The enemy, taking advantage of the weak defense of the Mense sector between Namur and Sedan, hurled overwhelming forces against it, namely a large number of armored divisions. The considerable strength of the assailing forces and their penetrating speed are such that the French "General Reserve",—being too weak, not sufficiently mobile and awkwardly placed from a strategic point of view,—will be unable to close the 60 mile gap in the allied front and hold up the enemy's advance; it will have to limit itself to the difficult task of forming a new continuous front, considerably weaker, along the Somme towards Laon and the Aisne, winding up at the Maginot Line.

The group of the northern allied armies is doomed to encirclement.





Worn out by fighting, Belgian troops seen on a road near Louvain

British and Belgian aviators and the other through the sublime sacrifice of a Belgian Engineer, Major Tilot: dashing alone through the German lines and with a charge of explosives on his back, he reached the bridge of Veldwezelt and blew himself up with it.

Contrary to some opinions, the fact that three bridges of the Albert Canal were not blown up on May 10, and that the fort of Eben Emael was captured the following day, did not have a

decisive influence on the ensuing development of military operations.

Of course, this unexpected setback facilitated the irruption of the invader into an important sector of our lines. But, even if it had not occurred, he had at his disposal many other means of breaking through. The plan of the British and French Armies—plan carefully studied long before the German offensive—was to deploy their forces on the KW line at the right of the sector to be occupied by the Belgian Army. This would put the BEF between Louvain and Wavre, and the First French Army between Wavre and Namur. The Ninth French Army was to hold the Meuse from Namur to Sedan, and the Seventh Army was to advance rapidly into Holland.

This plan was completely and thoroughly executed. On the morning of May 13, thanks to a splendid transportation operation, the bulk of British and French forces were massed on the anticipated line, ready to receive the enemy's blow. The time necessary for the execution of this plan had been gained by a heroic delaying action, fought inch by inch, by Belgian infantry divisions and cavalry corps. These troops retreated in good order from their original first line posts to the positions assigned to them on the KW line at the left of the Allied forces. This manoeuvre was carried out by our troops under constant crippling fire, under the pressure of innumer-

Huge clouds of smoke drift over Antwerp







Crater in the Antoine Dansart Street, Brussels

able armored columns, and without any protection against fierce attacks by Stuka dive bombers. The only help forthcoming was the cooperation of some light British elements and the brilliant counter-attacks of the French mechanized cavalry corps which, commanded by General Prioux, covered itself with glory during the Battle of Belgium.

The forts of Liège resisted heroically. For many days they kept pounding at the German communication lines.

On May 13, a continuous front between Antwerp and Bâle was established and the liaison of the French, British and Belgian forces completely effected. In 1914, it had taken two months of hard fighting before such a result had been achieved on a front running from Nieuport to Belfort, at the time of the memorable Battle of the Yser.

Alas, this front soon was to lose its continuity.

The Ninth French Army, over-extended on a sixty-mile line running from Namur to Sedan, destitute of adequate anti-tank artillery, devoid of armored cars, poorly protected by a very insufficient air force, was stationed behind the Meuse, whose value as a natural anti-tank obstacle had been overrated.

On May 13, the German infiltration into this sector starts. On the 14th, the armored columns cross the Meuse and irresistibly break through. Pierced at several points, the Ninth French Army is dislocated and progressively disorganized. By May 15th it has practically crumbled and a yawning gap sixty miles wide appears in the Allied front: this fateful gap was never to be closed. The mass of the Panzer divisions pours through with relentless speed under an arcade of supporting planes.

The day before, the Dutch Army had capit-

Street barricades in Louvain







What war meant to the common people of Belgium.



ulated. The Seventh French Army, badly mauled, was forced to retreat through Antwerp and Dutch Zeeland.

The strategic position is extremely serious. A powerful wedge was thrust between the separated sections of the battle front: the four Northern Armies are threatened with fatal isolation.

There being no "Réserve générale" mobile enough to outstrip the German drive and powerful enough to threaten its flank and block its advance, the group of the Northern Armies should be freed by a large scale manoeuvre toward the Southwest. But, to break off the engagement would be difficult; the mass of troops to be moved and the distances to be covered are very large; the communication lines are at the mercy of superior enemy air force and choked by a flood of panic-stricken refugees. Most of the units are not mechanized and those which are, are entangled with the enemy and weakened by several days of hard fighting; the already reduced number of tanks available for action is depleted by losses. Finally one would have to deliberately abandon a large and rich territory, and even probably uncover the coast.

"Modern strategy no longer is regulated by the pace of the infantry but by the speed of the automobile." The above mentioned manoeuvre is not attempted.

On the 16th, the fate of the Group of Northern Armies—the First and Seventh French Armies and some elements of what remains of the Ninth French Army, the BEF and the Belgian Army—is irrevocably sealed. The deep thrust penetration of the German armored divisions condemns it to encirclement which only a miracle can prevent: the miracle did not occur.

### Why the battles of Belgium and France were lost

IT HAS been argued that the defeat in Flanders and, more generally, the disaster which befell the Allies in Belgium and France, could have been avoided if the Franco-British forces had established themselves on the defensive along the fortified positions commanding the Franco-Belgian frontier, instead of coming to the aid of Belgium and Holland.

Indeed, a consideration of the relative strength of the opposing forces (1) should

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(1) Here is an approximate estimate of the military forces that took part in the Battle of Belgium, on the North-South offensive front, that is to say from Holland to Sedan:

For the Germans: 80 infantry divisions, 12 armored divisions and 3 mechanized divisions.

For the Allies: (French, British, Dutch and Belgian Armies) 50 infantry divisions, 1 armored division, 5 light mechanized divisions and 7 tank battalions.

But this numerical disproportion was severely aggravated by the fact that, on this front, in first line, the Germans could muster about 5000 tanks and some 5000 planes, against which the Allies could oppose only about 1500 tanks and 1600 planes. Furthermore, German equipment was on the whole modern and its proportion of medium and heavy tanks notably superior.

The general relation of fighting forces in the western theater of operations was also unfavorable to the Allies, especially when one considers their inferiority in tanks and planes. The divisions that France maintained at the Italian border and those which Germany stationed at various frontiers and in the annexed countries must of course be excluded from this calculation. The existence of fortified lines, among which the powerful Maginot Line, compensated only partially for this inequality of forces.

have counseled against the sending of four divisions to Holland. These would have been more useful in strengthening the Meuse sector and as a reserve force.

But strategically speaking, the front which ran from north to south, from Antwerp to Sedan, constituted a favorable position. It was a relatively short line; strongly buttressed by the fortifications of Antwerp, thereafter by the Scheldt River, and finally the North Sea, this battle line, had it been manned by sufficiently large forces, could have lent itself to a successful progressive "folding" manoeuvre. Such a manoeuvre could have taken full advantage of the Flanders waterways and the line could have pivoted on its right wing ending up by an alignment on the fortified Franco-Belgian frontier.

In rushing to the help of Belgium the Allies not only wanted to fulfill their promises, but also wished to establish themselves on the positions which they thought most favorable to them.

It may, however, still be open to question whether the pivot of the manoeuvre would have been able to hold out against the more numerous forces of the aggressor and his crushing superiority in planes and armored tanks, especially in heavy and medium tanks. (2)

One may also doubt that with the prevalence of such conditions the frontier position, either taken up at the very start or after the above-mentioned manoeuvre, could have been held.

If, on the other hand, France with the help of the British Expeditionary Force could have thrown some 5,000 first line planes and 5,000 first line tanks into the battle on the western front, the Allied forces, in spite of their appreciable inferiority in divisions, could have fought a successful defensive campaign, curbing the enemy's onrush until they could gain strength sufficient to launch a victorious counter-offensive.

These 5,000 tanks and 5,000 planes, in addition to 100% reserves and adequate auxiliary services, would have cost them not more than \$1,000,000,000, an expense hardly disproportionate to the immense resources of the British and French Empires. This sum, incidentally, is the indemnity being paid by France to Germany only for the maintenance of the occupation troops for one hundred days.

And even Hitler, doubting the success of a "blitzkrieg" might have hesitated to throw Germany into a war the long possible duration of which he would have feared.

Heavy tanks are the "capital ships" of land armies. Medium tanks are their "heavy cruisers." Armies which lack them or which have too few of them are powerless to counter-attack and to destroy those of the enemy. Anti-tank artillery, necessarily scattered, is not enough to do the job, any more than light tanks, too weakly armed and armored, are able to do it. If, in addition to this, the enemy's air force, which guides and

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(2) *The classification of tanks into heavy, medium and light tanks does not result from any established definition. The weight of a tank depends on the thickness of its armor-plating, its power to surmount and crush obstacles, the importance of its armament and its speed. For the latest models the name of light tank is usually given to those whose weight is under 12 tons; that of medium tanks to those weighing roughly between 16 and 28 tons. The heavy tanks weigh much more, the largest up to about 60 tons.*



supports the mechanized columns, enjoys a complete mastery of the air, the rupture of the front becomes inevitable. The enemy's armored and motorized divisions rush through the gaps thus opened, reach the rear lines of the scattered units and condemn them to a disastrous retreat or fatal encirclement.

Nevertheless, the tank, as well as the airplane, is a weapon which rapidly deteriorates. It is estimated that first line planes in active service suffer a depletion of 30% to 50% per month. Tanks used in varied ground fighting need a thorough overhauling of their caterpillars and engines after they have covered a certain mileage. This distance, which varies according to the type of tank and topographical, climatic and other conditions, has been estimated at about 400 to 600 miles for French and German tanks. Thus the use of tanks demands a complicated service organization insuring their rapid repair in the field, and considerable reserves to replace the losses sustained through enemy action as well as ordinary mechanical mishaps.

The "pauses" following the Battle of Flanders and, more recently, following the first rush of German armored columns into Libya are probably due to this subjection.

### **The Belgian Army, left wing of the Allied forces, holds during eighteen days**

**B**UT LET us return to events. The Battle of Flanders is about to start. The Belgian Army guarding the left wing of the Allied front is now about to face a heartbreaking calvary. On May 16, unshaken in spite of the violent thrust of an assailant superior both in numbers and arms, the Belgian Army is forced by strategic necessities and the orders of

Louvain, A Convent on fire



the Allied High Command to conform to the general retreating movement. This is caused by the ever-increasing menace of the right wing's encirclement: the First French Army under the command of General Blanchard, hard pressed on its front, is engaged on its right flank in an epic race to the sea with the panzer divisions.

Unbeaten, with rage in its heart, the Belgian Army is forced to abandon step by step the fortified positions and defense lines it had so laboriously prepared, and, with infinite sadness, to leave in the hands of the invader ever-increasing stretches of the national territory.

The 7th Belgian Army Corps, the mobile garrison of the fortified position of Namur (commanded by a fine soldier and gentleman, Lieutenant-General Deffontaine who, alas, recently died in captivity) has been ordered to abandon the fortress and succeeds, after a skill-

ful retreat, in joining the rest of the army and immediately resumes the fight.

Meanwhile, the German air force uninterruptedly bombs and machine-guns our lines of communication which are hopelessly tied up by interminable columns of refugees.

And still often without sleep and food, our soldiers retreat in good order, slowly, fighting bitterly and without respite.

The Army suffers, but without complaint. Silently, it accomplishes its duty, fiercely defending its own as well as its country's honor.

The forts of Namur and Liège, symbolizing the soul of the Belgian Army, are still holding.

On May 27, the Allied forces in Flanders, completely encircled for several days in a pocket which shrinks from hour to hour, savagely attacked all sides by land as well as by air, lacking any supply base because of the destruction of the port of Dunkerque, exhausted by eighteen days of manoeuvring and incessant fighting, heroically battle the enemy to prevent a complete crushing of their front.

The objective of the French and British Armies now is to fall back on a bridgehead small enough to be solidly held for a few days, so as to make possible the embarkation of the troops and save them from the enemy's claws. All available means are haphazardly gathered up from everywhere to that end.

Although there remains no hope of carrying off precious and considerable war materials which will have to be destroyed or abandoned, at least a supreme attempt will be made to save the 400,000 survivors of those once-splendid armies.

But the enemy guessed the manoeuvre. For several days, he multiplies most violent attacks in order to dislocate the French, British and Belgian lines, to penetrate the pocket, to spread disorder, to cut off all retreat to the coast and to consummate the total destruction of the Allied forces.

The Belgian Army, clinging to the "Canal de Dérivation de la Lys" east of Bruges as well as to the river Lys, has been furiously assailed since May 24. Because it covers the retreat of

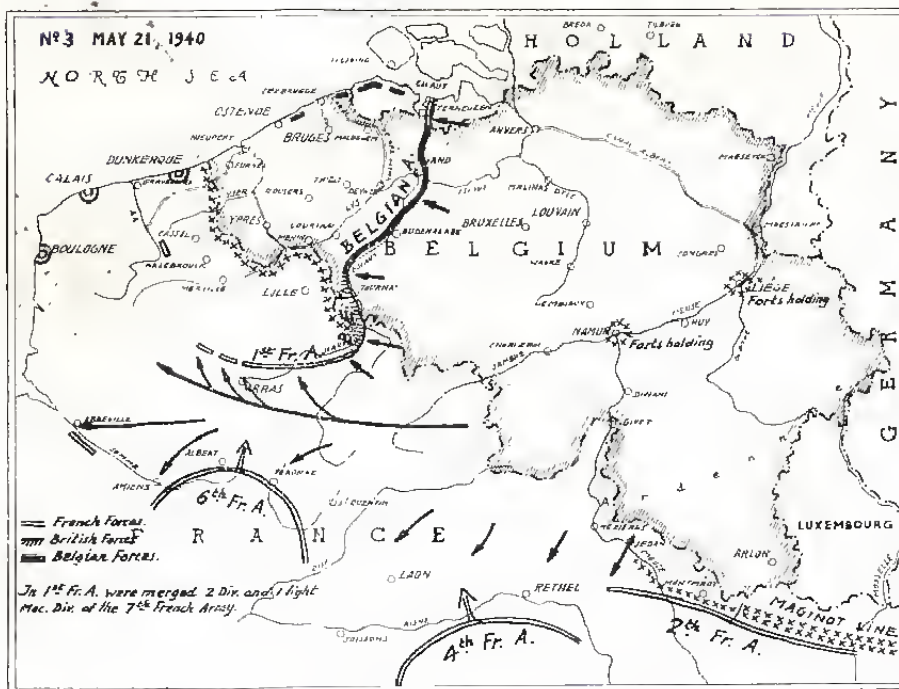


Namur. Flames and smoke shooting from the windows of a building.

An anti-tank post amid the ruins in Louvain





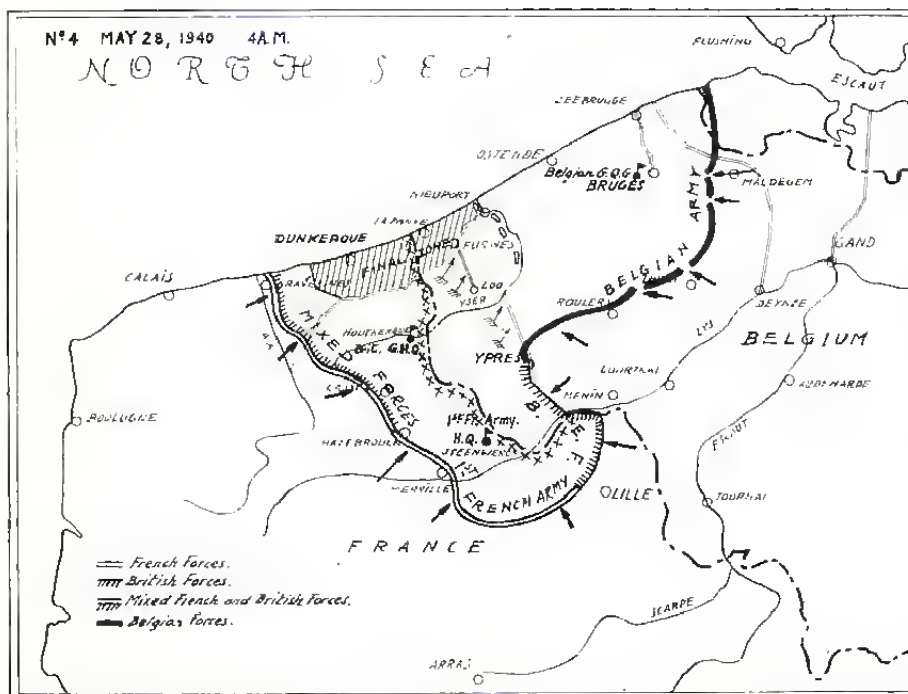


MAP No. 3.

Constantly and strenuously pressed by superior enemy forces, the left wing (Belgian army) of the northern allied armies group resisted tenaciously. But the increasing surrounding of the right wing (First French army) inflicted a general strategic retreat along the Scheldt and Scarpe line. An attempted counter-offensive, starting simultaneously from Arras and Albert, for the purpose of reconsolidating the allied front, will have to be abandoned due to lack of means in spite of the support given by the Belgian army in extending considerably its

front towards the South in order to relieve allied troops assigned to take part in this offensive.

A few days later, the iron ring will be closed up to the coast by the capture of Boulogne and Calais.



MAP No. 4.

Beginning May 23rd, the enemy launches a tremendous attack against the Belgian front in order to crush the left wing of the Allies, stab the French and British armies in the back and annihilate them. The Belgian army, holding its positions step by step, to the limit of its might, protected the retreat of the bulk of the allied forces towards the small "final zone", shown by hatchings, from where no less than 340,000 men were able to be embarked.

Had the Belgian army not resisted to the extent of a total sacrifice, the enemy could

have cut off the retreat of the Allies towards the coast and thus the epic of Dunkerque would not be immortalized in history.

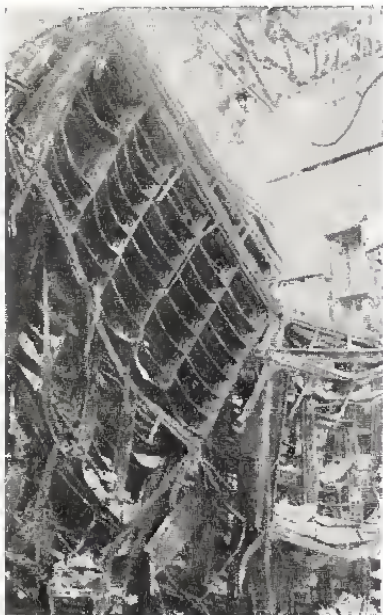
the other armies, the Germans have to crush it.

In the extreme north the Belgian Army still holds out, but the pressure on the rest of its front is too strong to be borne. Decimated, exhausted, lacking munitions, its movements and provisioning hindered by aerial bombardment and the swarm of refugees, it is forced to fall back in

several sectors under the impact of superior and ever-replenished forces. Several gaps are opened and remain yawning for lack of reserves to close them. The line crumbles and the end is inexorably approaching.

The Belgian Army protected the retreat of its allies to the last limit of its capacity to resist. It could not, as they, withdraw. Its embarkation being impossible, it could not find its salvation. To withdraw behind the Yser would not only be useless, but would dangerously obstruct a zone hardly sufficient for the movements of the French and British

Some of the book-racks of  
Louvain Library



Namur. Horses killed during the German air attacks, lying in the deserted street

forces. Moreover, many causes render the crossing of the river by an army of 350,000 (3) men materially impossible.

All it can still do, as an ultimate aid to the Allies, is, in order to prevent the enemy from hampering their embarkation, to remain in place, to prepare the destruction of the river's bridges and to spread protective floods.

The Belgian Army had protected the arrival of the Allied forces into Belgium; it also shielded their departure to the total exhaustion of its strength.

For several days the Allies were advised of our Army's desperate situation; unfortunately they could not succor it.

The Belgian Army overlooked no means nor shirked any sacrifice to help the Allies to extricate themselves. In spite of its misery, it went so far as to send back in its own trucks a last French division, which had remained in its sector, in order that this unit could guard the Allied flank along the Yser.

(3) This is all that remained—in the zone east of the Yser—of the 600,000 men of our army after eighteen days of fighting and retreats: losses had been severe; training centers, comprising 50,000 men, and part of auxiliary services, had been evacuated to France; and finally, there were still certain Belgian units stationed at the west of the Yser. These mostly included anti-aircraft artillery, search-light-units and troops entrusted with the protection of the lines of communication in that sector.





The Louvain Library after the fire

## Up to the last the Belgian Army loyally covers the withdrawal of its Allies

ALL RESISTANCE, henceforth, becomes impossible.

Duty done, the sacrifice of thousands of human lives—soldiers and civilians—would be useless.

The King bows before the inevitable. "Everything is lost—everything but honor."

On May 28, at 4 a. m., the Belgian Army ceases firing. It had been forced to resign itself to surrender, but it can face the world. During eighteen days, the Belgian Army stood up against battering assaults; on the nineteenth, it fell exhausted. Heroically it had fulfilled its duties.

At the time, an eighteen-day resistance seemed quite short. But the Blitzkrieg then was still little known. Today, however, this resistance has become a record!

It is no longer necessary to refute the charges so carelessly made immediately after the surrender of the Belgian Army, as to the circumstances which surrounded it and its repercussions on the operations of the Allied Armies. The most highly placed testimonials and the official documents have long since established the undeniable truth.

A row of gutted houses at Bouillon.





Terror reflecting from the faces of young and old refugees as they watched fierce German aerial bombardment of their homes

It may, however, prove useful to underline here certain important facts. I can testify to their accuracy personally, the execution of my military mission having given me the opportunity of being a witness of them. Here they are:

1. On May 27, the General Headquarters of the Group of Northern Armies, several times forced to shift its location because of air raids and tank incursions,

could not be reached by any means of communication. Therefore, it did not transmit any information or orders to the subordinate armies during that day.

The British GHQ also had to move for the same reasons. General telephone communications were cut, but radiotelegraphic transmissions could be sent at rare intervals. This permitted the Belgian Command to contact General Gort, namely, at his last HQ at Houtkerque before his displacement to La Panne effected on May 28.

The HQ of the First French Army at Steenwerck, was deprived of all means of communication with the Group of Armies, the British GHQ and the Belgian GHQ.

2. Nevertheless, thanks to the diligence of the Belgian High Command, the French and British were able in good time to line the Yser with defending troops and, farther back on the Loo Canal, to prevent the enemy from passing detachments across it. The majority of these troops were at their stations on May 28.

Troops belonging to a French division were willingly liberated by the Belgian Command and placed on the Yser, in direct execution of the orders given by the General Chief of the French military Mission to the Belgian GHQ and in agreement with the latter. English troops guarded the bridges of the Loo Canal and, toward the end of the day, English batteries were posted behind Nieuport.

In flight from the German invaders as raiding Nazi planes roar overhead





3. On the 28th, the bridges on the Yser were blown up and the sector was flooded. However, the Dixmude bridge was blown up on the 29th, early in the morning, by a British detachment.

During the last 48 hours the Belgian Army made all the necessary preparations, of which it informed the Allied High Command.

4. The German Army was unable to cross the Yser on May 28. Having demanded at 9 a. m. that the Belgian Army grant it unhampered passage across its zone, the enemy was able to rush toward the river only light detachments, which found the bridges cut and were met by the fire of the guarding forces.

It is only after several days, the embarkation having been completed, that the enemy was able to penetrate the little bridgehead between Nieuport and Dunkerque where the French and British troops had finally taken refuge.

These facts prove that, in spite of the difficulties of communication, the Belgian High Command warned the Allied Commands in time, and up to the last minute loyally and diligently took all measures in its power to protect the withdrawal of the Allied Armies and permit them to establish a protective line for their embarkation zone.

The Belgian Army of 1940 did its duty to the very last.

As in 1914, its conduct was heroic and gallant. It was worthy of the noble traditions immortalized by the defenders of Liège, Namur, Antwerp and the Yser.

It can await history's judgment without fear.

The crack-troops, the "Chasseurs Ardennais", in a défilé



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